Rescue Me

by ArwynandCole

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Summary: After the "final battle", the ninja team run into trouble with the Serpentine and are captured. It's up to Arwyn to save the day, but is she strong enough? (Try it, you might like it!) Rated T for some violence and suggestive content/language. ColeXArwyn

1. Chapter 1

I do not own Ninjago, only my OC Arwyn, my Green Ninja. Read my profile for backstory, since my little world does not follow that of the official. The idea for this (my first story) was inspired by "Hopeless" by Flowerpower1800. The idea for Pythor's plan for Arwyn was inspired by VelvetPersona. This story takes place after the "defeat of the dark lord". Hope you enjoy and review!

Normally Arwyn would have appreciated a bright and sunny winter's day in Ninjago City. Not today. Then again, she did not usually get ambushed by Serpentine while out shopping with Cole, Kai, Jay, and Zane.

They had been out picking up necessary grocery items, then lunching at a coffee shop. Nya had stayed behind with eleven-year-old Lloyd who was ill with a cold. Wu was on an unexplained excursion with Garmadon who had recently joined the other residents of _Destiny's Bounty_ after the final "battle".

At that time, Arwyn had managed to heal him of the Great Devourer's venom and transformed him back into normal human form using the Mega Weapon and the elemental powers contained within her and the four elemental masters of spinjitzu. Lloyd was grateful that "defeating the dark lord" actually

meant removing the evil that ran through Garmadon's veins so that he had his father with him now.

It had been several weeks since this incident and there had been very few sightings of Serpentine, so the ninja team had been less alert than usual. As Arwyn saw it now, that had been a huge mistake.

Today they had been out in civilian clothing with minimal weaponry when the Serpentine had erupted from every sewer opening in this part of the city. The entire ninja team had jumped into the fray with only knives in their hands, using spinjitzu and their elemental powers where they could. They were limited, however, since many citizens were mixed in with the Serpentine. Most were running hysterically, but a brave few were attempting to fight the snakes.

The only advantage the ninja had was that the Serpentine had called for Arwyn's capture in the name of Pythor when they realized who was resisting them, so the reptiles' fighting had been less deadly. The ninja's injuries were limited to large bruises and lacerations. In contrast, this only made the elemental masters' fighting more furious. Several dead and dying snakes lay all around them.

Fighting in a close group, the five ninja had been able to keep the Serpentine at bay for over an hour and helped scores of citizens get to safety, but had made no headway in the battle. To make matters worse, the reptiles had apparently multiplied in number since the last battle at the time of Garmadon's healing. They could also tell that the ninja were tiring.

Now Cole realized the horde was pressing harder and began looking for a way to retreat, but they were surrounded. The team leader managed to signal the others to come in closer to him. Between counterattacks with two Venomari, he addressed the small group with a worried tone, "We're weakening here, and they know it! We have to make a break for it, or we may not make it out at all!"

Zane froze a Hypnobrai who was replaced by three others. "They want Arwyn! We must at least get _her_ out of this now!" he suggested. Cole winced at this. He knew Zane was right, but had not wanted to separate her from the rest of the team if they did not have to do so.

Arwyn emphatically shook her head in a negative reply after she dodged a Fangpyre who was kicked back out of their circle by Kai. "Forget it! I'm not going without everyone else!" she shouted adamantly as she finished off the red snake with a blast of green energy.

"You will if I order it!" countered Cole resolutely as he pulled his tanto blade from the chest of one Venomari. Great. Even though he did not want her to leave, he was now going to have to force her to do it.

Arwyn began to protest ardently, "I can't leave you…" _Especially you, Cole_.

Kai interrupted, pointing to the left, "There's a narrow alley not far away! If we could make it over that way…"

"We could provide cover until she gets far enough away!" finished Jay with enthusiasm as he electrocuted a Constrictai who was attempting to grab him.

"This is just stupid! What about the rest of you?" argued Arwyn desperately. "If you stay behind, they may kill you!"

"As your protectors, that is a risk we have to take," Zane said calmly while countering another attack. Arwyn kicked a snake in the throat, then gave the ice ninja a frustrated look. "Really?!"

Cole shoved away a Constrictai, knocking over three more Serpentine with the snake's body. He faced Arwyn, his greenish-grey eyes flashing, and stated with determination, "If you can escape, we'll take whatever chance we have to."

"By being martyrs for the Green Ninja? What kind of sense does that make when I've already fulfilled my destiny?" Arwyn yelled, although she knew she had already lost this battle. Ignoring her jabs, Cole turned to the men and said, "Alright, guys, we've got a plan. Let's do it!"

The teammates became more energized with motivation and began to slowly push their way closer to the alley, using their elements to keep the Serpentine army at bay. They once again heard the Hypnobrai commander bellow, "Under Pythor'sss ordersss, do not harm the female!" which only made them more determined to get Arwyn away.

When they reached the alley, Cole paused in his fighting and pulled Arwyn to him while Zane, Kai, and Jay quickly circled them. She threw her arms around his neck and clung to him, hoping he would not make her leave them. His breath was warm against her ear as he whispered, "You have to go, sweetheart, or this may not end well. Who knows what Pythor has in mind."

He stepped back from her slightly, pushed a wavy lock of black hair from her face, and looked earnestly into her tear-filled brown eyes. As much as she did not want to go, he hated making her go even more. "I love you," whispered Arwyn fervently. He gave her little smile and said, "I love you, too," before he kissed her quickly, then forced himself to push her toward the alley. "Now go!"

Trying to hide the anguish in his face, the ninja leader whirled back to face the Serpentine wall, shouting, "Blast them, guys!" while breaking up parts of the sidewalk and street with concussive force as Zane, Kai, and Jay simultaneously sent a barrage of their respective elements at the snakes.

Arwyn froze, unwilling to abandon them, and began in a pleading voice, "I can't…" She was interrupted when Zane, anxious to have her safely away, grabbed her arm and roughly shoved her toward the alley. "GO _NOW_!" he yelled uncharacteristically.

"We'll be okay!" assured Jay as she stumbled into the shadow-lined space. Cole looked over his shoulder, slightly irritated to find her still there. "Run, Arwyn! That's an order!" he barked. At this, Arwyn, wide-eyed and battling with herself, turned and sprinted down the alley, dodging several scaly, grasping hands. Her tears began to fall as four of the people she loved the most were left behind her.

After running through several alleys, leaping over gates, and climbing up an escape ladder, she found herself on the roof of a building down the block. Arwyn had managed to elude the Serpentine and now watched from her secret perch as the four elemental masters were ultimately overpowered and captured by the snakes.

With a humorless smile, she noted that even in restraints, her brothers continued to resist their captors, earning them more blows, with Kai eventually being dragged down the street by his feet. Arwyn rolled onto her back in the snow on the rooftop after the captive group had been pulled down into a manhole and looked up at the clear winter sky. _What now?_

Arwyn spent two hungry, sleepless, and worry-filled days and nights hiding in the snowy city before she tried to make her way back to _Destiny's Bounty._ She was unable to get far since she found the way blocked by scouting snakes.

Using her comlink, Arwyn managed to get a cryptic message to Nya explaining the situation, asking her to stay put for now and take care of Lloyd, and requesting she bring money, her uniform and katana, and one of Cole's black uniforms to a certain location. After that, she was able to find a small, abandoned studio apartment for shelter and began to seek the captured ninja.

By day she dressed in jeans and a sweat shirt and mingled with the dwindling crowds of city-dwellers and patrolling Serpentine. By night she sneaked about in the shadows in Cole's uniform and sometimes braved the sewers looking for clues, but was always driven back to the surface world by the sheer numbers of snakes.

Each and every day, an announcement went out through the city that the Green Ninja should turn herself in and that lenience would be granted her and her friends. Each and every day Arwyn fought the temptation to end whatever trials the ninja were experiencing by doing just that. Many nights she debated, prayed, and cried before allowing herself to collapse for much-needed rest before starting the cycle over again. She was beginning to believe there was no hope for a rescue.

Starting with a short chapter. If I get even one positive review, I'll post the next!:)

2. Chapter 2

A/N I don't own Ninjago. Warning: Violence against main characters ahead in case that bothers you.

One evening, just over a month after the ambush and capture, Arwyn decided on another jaunt through the sewers. She knew it was going to be another sleepless night and that she would probably spend it feeling guilty about being the only free ninja and making herself miserable with thoughts of how Cole was faring.

She fastened the sheath of her tanto to her right lower leg over her tabi boot, then headed out for the south side of town in Cole's black suit. As she looked down from a rooftop a few minutes later, she spotted a sewer entry that she had not previously tried.

Soon she was dropping down into a seemingly empty section of sewer tunnel. After letting her eyes adjust, Arwyn began moving further east, hugging the tunnel wall and listening for anything other than the dripping of water.

When she had been moving along the tunnel for about half an hour and was starting to wonder where she might be, Arwyn began to hear voices in the distance and could make out a faint glow of light. She cautiously hastened her pace to close the distance more quickly, wanting to discover the source of the voices that now sounded angry and impatient.

Turning a corner in the tunnel, she saw light spilling into the passage over fifty feet away. Her heart pounding, Arwyn stopped and listened as one last irritated voice yelled, "Where would she be hiding?" She could barely hear a mumbled response, then a loud smacking sound. A moment of tense silence was followed by a loud command. "Bring this piece of filth back to his cell!"

From the shadows of the underground tunnel, Arwyn watched as two Serpentine commanders stepped into her view and purposefully headed in the opposite direction down the otherwise quiet and deserted-looking passageway.

Light scuffling was heard from the lighted chamber before three more Serpentine guards entered the hall a minute later pulling a bound and bloodied, defiant-looking young man with disheveled brown hair along with them.

Without a warning, the Green Ninja dashed toward the small group, blasting the three unsuspecting guards with bolts of electricity, killing them instantly.

A startled Kai flinched and turned back toward the attacker, blinking rapidly, not believing that Arwyn stood before him. Drawing her tanto blade from its sheath on her leg, Arwyn wordlessly cut Kai's bounds as he regained his composure.

"There's a ladder to a manhole in this interrogation room," he informed her as he headed back into the dimly lit room. Once they were standing in

the street, an elated Arwyn embraced the first ninja brother she had seen in over a month before leading him in the direction of her shelter.

At the apartment, Arwyn treated Kai's swollen right eye, bloody nose, and other multiple wounds to his head and torso while she listened to his story of capture and imprisonment by the Serpentine.

When they were first overcome, the snakes had debated whether or not to kill them in the street, but the commander surmised that they may later be useful bait in luring the last ninja to Pythor. Therefore, he, Cole, Zane, and Jay had been dragged down to the prison area of the sewer headquarters which the Serpentine had secretly developed for months before overthrowing the city. There they were chained and held in separate cells in the same area of the sewer for the last month. They were fed little and given no information about anything.

The only interaction they had with the snakes most of the time was the regular interrogation session. Each day at least one of them would be separated from the others and questioned and beaten for about thirty minutes. Each time it was the same thing, repeated questions regarding the whereabouts and powers of the Green Ninja.

"Where is the Green Ninja? How can we find her? How strong is she? What powers does she possess? What are her weaknesses? Which of you does she care for the most?" Over and over they were asked. He said that they had all agreed to refuse to give any answers other than, "I don't know", which frustrated and angered the snakes, causing more abuse.

Arwyn listened to his account with furrowed brows and a set jaw while she tried to concentrate on tending to his wounds. Her heart ached and her stomach turned at the thought of her brothers suffering these cruelties at the hands of the snakes simply because of her absence.

The final straw was the image of her beloved Cole chained and being struck repeatedly while he would not admit that he was the one she loved. Tears began to run down her face as she finished dressing a laceration on Kai's back. When she was done, she dropped the gauze and covered her face with her hands, sobbing into them.

Kai turned quickly, not surprised that she had finally let go, and put an arm around her shoulders. "You can't let this break you down, Arwyn. It's what they want. If we come up with a plan and keep our courage up, we can get them out." He paused. "Although, what I really want to do is get as many weapons as I can hold and head down there tonight!" he finished furiously.

The hour was growing late when Arwyn wiped her tears and looked at her teammate. "We're both exhausted, Kai. We should probably get some rest and hold off on making plans until tomorrow."

"Yeah, you're right," he agreed. "I feel like collapsing. By the way, is there, like, no heat at _all_ in this place?"

"Nope. I think the furnace is broken. I freeze every night. We're lucky the electricity is still on. There's also just the one single bed."

They looked at it, then at each other. Kai took a breath, "If you don't get to feeling all guilty or anything, I won't tell Cole if you won't."

"Right about now I'm good with it, so long as you don't hog the blankets," Arwyn replied.

After a restless night, they began plans for a rescue of the remaining three ninja. Before they could get much done, an announcement was made throughout the city for everyone to turn on their televisions. This was unusual, so Arwyn turned her attention to the screen while Kai went to the sink for a glass of water.

Pythor's purple, scaly face suddenly filled the screen demanding to know the whereabouts of the Green and fire ninja. He threatened that more harm would come to the remaining ninja if the two fugitives did not soon surrender to him.

After saying this, Pythor moved aside to show four humanoid snakes dragging a handcuffed and struggling Cole into the room. His head and naked upper body were bruised and bloodied just as Kai's had been.

As they threw him to the floor, he looked up at the camera and yelled, "I know they're demanding you surrender, but don't even _think_ about it, Arwyn! I know Kai's with you! Stick together, and don't give up!"

He barely had time to finish before a snake began viciously kicking him in the thighs, back, and abdomen, while another snake began lashing him front and back with a thin bamboo pole, creating fresh lacerations. The ninja leader set his jaw and tried to turn his face to avoid being hit, but was not very successful.

Kai leapt in front of the television screen too late as Arwyn sprang from her chair, crying out in horror.

"Get out of the way, Kai!" Arwyn screamed, trying to push him to the side so she could see what else was happening to Cole.

Kai grabbed her upper arms and pushed her backward away from the television, but when she stumbled and nearly fell, he pulled her to him. "You didn't need to see that," he whispered against her hair while she cried on his shoulder.

She could hear Cole cursing and his occasional cries of pain for several minutes before the segment finally ended and the screen went black.

Once she had calmed down, Arwyn tried to focus on drilling Kai about every small detail he could possibly remember regarding the sewer layout, distances, and the snakes' routine. A map was soon sketched out showing the prison cells in relation to the original interrogation room. Kai had noticed that the room in which Cole was tortured was the not the same one the Serpentine had been using for the last month.

"They must be anticipating another rescue through the manhole," he remarked as they drew up the map.

Looking at the map and the estimated distances made Arwyn realize that entry could possibly be made into the prison area through the basement of a nearby building. Plans were made to scout the building in the afternoon and possibly enter it after nightfall.

"Any idea what to do once we get in there?" asked Kai.

"I want the golden weapons," answered Arwyn. "We could wreak a lot of havoc with those. I just need to contact Nya for a delivery."

Nya was contacted and was overjoyed to hear that Kai was out safely, but was very fearful for Jay and the others who remained. Kai tried to reassure her that Jay would soon be free, but he was not very convincing. A spot for dropping off the weapons was chosen, however, it would be later on the next day before it could be done. They realized this procedure would require a lot of patience.

In the afternoon, another announcement was made for everyone to view the next torture session. Kai and Arwyn watched anxiously as Pythor went through his familiar you-must-surrender-now monologue before he revealed that Zane was to suffer for Arwyn's absence. The snakes had rigged the area to act as a sauna and sealed the door after dragging in the roughened-looking and restrained ninja of ice. A thermometer near the camera showed the temperature rise rapidly as the seconds ticked.

"They're going to try to overheat his circuitry," murmured Kai.

Sweat soon began to pour from Zane's reddened face, and he grew restless. As the digital thermometer quickly passed 190 degrees, the ice ninja looked up at the camera and gave it a half-hearted smile.

"Arwyn, be strong. _Do..Not..Surrender_, no matter what happens. It is most important that you are _not_ captured and controlled," he said emphatically before making an attempt to cool things off by creating his element around him on the floor and walls.

Unfortunately, the ice could not withstand the rising temperature and melted fairly quickly. At 240 degrees, Zane was panting and looking dazed. After several minutes of this, Arwyn rose from her chair and walked stiffly into the bathroom. Just before the temperature reached 300 degrees, the ice ninja closed his eyes and collapsed against the wall. The screen went black. Kai could hear Arwyn retching in the bathroom.

Just after twilight, Arwyn and Kai took to the rooftops of Ninjago City heading for the area of the original sewer interrogation room. From the snowy rooftops of the nearby buildings, they estimated where things might be in relation to Kai's map. It was decided that it may indeed be possible to enter the prison cells from the basement of another building on the block. Then they noticed more Serpentine than usual moving in and out of that building.

"Well, at least we figured correctly," stated Kai. "Nothing about this is going to be easy!"

On their way back to the apartment, Kai noticed that Arwyn seemed unhappy and preoccupied, said very little and avoided eye contact. As they sat at a very basic supper, he tried to engage her in planning what they would actually do with the golden weapons when they got them, but she remained taciturn and ate only a few bites. Once they had crawled into the small, cold bed, Kai tried again to get Arwyn to talk about what was bothering her. She said only that she was tired and turned her back to him.

Sometime after midnight, Kai woke from a small noise and felt the still-warm, empty spot on the bed next to him.

"Arwyn?"

He looked around the dark room and saw no light coming from the bathroom. Throwing back the cover, he jumped out of the bed and flung open the bathroom door, only to find it empty. Running to the apartment door, he yanked it open and peered out at the dimly-lit street.

There were footprints in the snow leading from the door and down the street in the direction of a known sewer headquarters entrance. Without thinking, Kai ran into the street barefooted wearing only a T-shirt and light pants, following the tracks, but not daring to yell Arwyn's name.

After only a few dozen yards, he saw a dark form walking down the sidewalk. Making as little noise as possible, the fire ninja dashed ahead. When he got nearer and she turned to look back, Kai dove forward, tackling Arwyn and rolling with her into a snowdrift.

As she attempted to spring back up, Kai held her arms tightly, panting, "Where do you think _you're_ going?"

The tears shone on her face as she turned away from him, jerking one arm away. "I'm ending this tonight. No one else needs to continue suffering because of me!"

He stood quickly, taking the struggling woman up with him. She was wearing her dark green uniform with the tanto blade strapped to its customary spot on her right boot. Kai slipped the knife from its sheath and stuck it into the back of his waistband.

"What are you doing?!" she asked angrily.

"Removing sharp objects and taking you back to the apartment and bed," he answered, turning her in the direction from which they had come.

"I'm not going back! I'm turning myself in and stopping their torture!" she insisted, jerking around to face him again.

"Are you serious?" he yelled at her incredulously. "We did what we did to get you out of there so we wouldn't all be captured and made into snakes.

You cannot make our sacrifice worthless by handing yourself over to them! Don't you realize that they want to use you and the entire ninja team? I don't know why they haven't tried to change us yet, but that's more than likely what will happen."

He tried to turn her face to look at him. "And you will _not_ stop any of the suffering by surrendering! It would only continue until we died! Remember what Cole told you!"

Arwyn swiped at a tear before knocking his hands away. "I can't let this continue, and we are getting nowhere fast!"

"Get out of my way!" She made a move to step around him, but he blocked her.

"You're not going anywhere," he stated firmly.

The tears continued as Arwyn said, "I have to, Kai! Don't make me fight you!"

"It won't be much of a fight," he countered. "You're in no shape to take me on. You can barely focus right now."

With the issuance of that challenge, she made a move to his right, then spun around and slipped past Kai on his left, planting her elbow hard into his ribs as she moved rapidly past him.

As he bent over from the blow, he twisted his body quickly to his right, sweeping his right foot into her path and sending her sprawling for a second time into the snow. She was up again just as fast as she went down. Facing him, Arwyn successfully blocked Kai on the right and the left when he grabbed for her.

But when he faked with another grab on the left, she missed the punch he sent on the right and was caught just below the eye. Stunned by the blow, the Green Ninja reacted with surprise as Kai caught her from behind in a head lock and began dragging her backward toward the apartment building.

She clutched at his arm with both hands to avoid being choked, digging in her short nails while trying to get her feet under her.

When he continued moving toward the apartment without slowing down, Arwyn stopped struggling and cried out, "S-stop! Let l-loose, and I'll stay!"

Kai did not falter. "Promise you won't try to surrender?"

"I p-promise!" she choked out.

He slowed down in the street, then released her, turning her towards him. "Did I hurt you much?" he asked with concern, his hands on her shoulders.

"No," she said quietly, tilting her head so he might not see her swollen eye.

"Okay, then, let's get back to bed. My feet are freezing, and I can't _wait_ to put them on your back," he said with an evil grin as he put his arm around her shoulders and hastened her down the street.

First thing the next morning the announcement was made to turn on televisions, and although Kai tried to get Arwyn to leave the room, she stubbornly refused. Pythor began with his demand for the surrender of Arwyn and Kai, after which, a shirtless and bruised Jay was unceremoniously dumped backwards into a wooden chair.

As his hands were tied to each side of the back of it by two Serpentine soldiers, he called out, "Don't watch this, Arwyn! It's _not_ gonna be pretty! And don't even _think _about surrendering it won't do us any g-ooww!"

He was interrupted with a threatening blow to the head by his captors. Without further ceremony, the purple snake king turned his attention to the restrained blue ninja and started the litany of familiar questions regarding Arwyn.

Every time Jay answered "I don't know" a Serpentine knife flashed down and cut his back, causing the lightning ninja to flinch hard and cry out while gripping the chair with white-knuckled fists. Blood soon ran from his back to the floor after soaking his pants.

Kai grimaced several times, remembering the healing lacerations on his own back from a similar, but much shorter session with the questioners. When he glanced over at her, he saw that Arwyn stared straight ahead at the scene, pale, trembling, and glassy-eyed.

She said nothing, but prayed fervently that Nya could not see this. After about fifteen questions and slashes, the snakes stopped, and Jay leaned forward against the chair back, panting, in obvious pain.

Pythor faced the camera again. "Dear Arwyn, you are running out of time. I will soon get your beloved to reveal himself. When that happens, he will regret withholding such information. Also, the time for your surrender is at hand. I would like you to be here when your teammates are made into my scaly and obedient subjects!"

His evil laugh could be heard as the screen went black.

A/N This is killing Arwyn! Like? Review!

3. Chapter 3

**A/N Don't own Ninjago. Warning: Violence against major character if that bothers you. **

**Thanks to my 3 (yay, 3!) positive reviewers for being able to read my (sort of) back story, suspend Ninjago reality, and realize I wrote this before the last 5-6 episodes! Here's cake and ice cream!
**

Chapter 3

Jay had been brought back to his cell with a towel draped over his back. He now lay chained and supine on the fabric on his concrete bed hoping to stop the oozing blood. "Kai's been gone almost two full days now. Do you really think he might be alive and with Arwyn?" he asked with a wince.

Cole answered, "He's gotta be. The 'interrogations' have been stepped up and gotten worst. They are really pissed about something."

"You are correct," interjected a weak Zane from his rock-hard bed. "Also, the new torture room and the addition of cameras could mean that the Serpentine have moved operations to avoid more rescue attempts and are trying to influence someone's emotions with a broadcast documentation of our treatment."

"You may have something there, Zane," Cole frowned, but then grimaced at the discomfort this caused his bruised and bloodied forehead.

One of his biggest concerns right now was that their sometimes softhearted-to-a-fault teammate might crack under the snakes' pressure to surrender. Viewing their torture sessions could not be helping, and he was certain she was seeing it all. He knew she was in Ninjago City searching for them, and he suspected that she had found Kai. He drew a slow breath before stopping due to the stabbing pain of cracked ribs.

"I hope Arwyn's okay and doesn't let all this get to her too badly," he sighed.

"How could it _not_?" Jay asked with a bitter laugh. "You know how she is, and we're a pretty pathetic bunch right now."

"Kai is quite tough. He will take care of Arwyn and help her stay strong," Zane said encouragingly.

"Yeah. He'll take care of her," Cole said a little resentfully under his breath, wishing he was the one with Arwyn.

Thoughts of her the past month were the only things that had kept him sane. Worry for her safety kept him from being concerned for his own. The fact that the snakes did not have her encouraged the ninja leader's hope that his love was well and a rescue was still possible. He knew it was best that she had someone with her, however, knowing that the impulsive and competitive fire ninja was that someone still made him a little annoyed.

A while later, from down the hall outside of the cells, the three ninja could hear the approach of at least a pair of conversing Serpentine.

"I have just received word that the Green Ninja hasss been apprehended. Now Pythor will have control of her _and_ her powerssss!" hissed one snake.

"Yesss! And she will make a wonderful contribution to the Serpentine gene pool once she is turned into one of usss and is made hisss queen," said another.

Their words sent a shock through the three ninja. However, none more so than Cole, who, despite his painful ribs and better judgment, sat straight up on his concrete bench shouting, "_NO FREAKIN' WAY!_"

He immediately clapped a hand over his mouth as the heads of Jay and Zane whipped around to look at him in wide-eyed disbelief for likely giving away the secret of his relationship with Arwyn.

As he hoped desperately that this news was not true and mentally kicked himself for reacting in such a way, a Serpentine head came into his view, tongue flicking in glee.

"Ahh, so the lover of the Green Ninja hasss revealed himself! Pythor will be pleasssed, and we have more entertainment for the evening!"

Elsewhere, about midafternoon a young couple stood in the shadows near the drop-off site at a marketplace on the edge of the city. Their anxiety was not outwardly noticed, but was keenly felt by each.

"Where in the world is she? Nya is usually pretty punctual," Kai hissed.

"Give her a chance. She might be held up by something," said Arwyn in an attempt to soothe herself as well as him.

They had already been there over twenty minutes. It was getting harder for them stay relaxed-looking as they watched Serpentine guards mingling with the few inhabitants of Ninjago City who had not fled after the occupation.

After another half hour or so of trying not to loiter, they became more alert when they noticed a familiar case carried by a caped and hooded figure. The caped figure walked to a display of produce, placed the case on the ground close to the stand, and chose a few root vegetables before bagging them and making a transaction with the merchant.

As the person turned away and began to cross the marketplace, a hand from beneath the cape was pointed in the ninja's direction with the sign for "I love you". Kai signed back, and he and Arwyn nonchalantly retrieved the case and made their way back to the small apartment.

At the apartment, they eagerly opened the case from which shone a golden, pulsating light. The four golden weapons of spinjitzu hummed quietly as Arwyn ran her hand over them.

"You haven't told me what you ultimately plan to do with these," Kai remarked as he noticed her thoughtful expression.

"I'm hoping to destroy the Serpentine army," Arwyn answered matter-of-factly.

Before he could comment, another announcement was made across the city to turn on televisions. Arwyn's heart fell as she gave Kai a startled look. He turned on the monitor, then went to stand uneasily near her as Pythor appeared on the screen.

"Greetings, Green Ninja. I should have known that you would take no less than the strong, heroic, and rock-solid leader of the ninja team to be your lover."

At his words, Arwyn drew a sharp breath, an expression of fear on her face. Kai glanced worriedly over at her, knowing this would probably be the worst torture session yet, and that he had no chance of keeping her from seeing it.

Pythor continued, "As you enjoy the following demonstration of his endurance, and you think of his love and dedication to you, know that your paramour will soon no longer be the man he is today. By this time tomorrow he will begin the transformation to become one of the Serpentine army. But, do not despair, for you are invited to join him in that enviable condition. However, you will not be relegated to being a lowly subject, for you, Arwyn, will be made my queen, able to enjoy _all_ of the privileges that go with being my consort! All you have to do is show up for the ceremony."

Pythor turned away from the camera, and Cole, in handcuffs and shackles, was dragged into the room by four guards with multiple lacerations and new bruising visible over his right rib cage and flank.

This time he looked more fatigued and a little gaunt, but still visibly seethed as he eyed Pythor with hatred. He was made to stand about four feet from the Anacondrai king, facing him, flanked on either side by a pair of Serpentine guards.

"I'm sure you have heard by now that the Green Ninja has surrendered to me and is being prepared to be transformed into my Serpentine queen," goaded Pythor.

Cole furiously lunged forward as much as his restraints would allow and nearly spat out his words.

"There is no way in _hell_ Arwyn would do that, and there's no way in _hell_ Kai would let her!"

"Ah, but you know so little about them, earth ninja," Pythor crooned. "Arwyn has surrendered in the hopes of obtaining leniency for you all and becoming my mate. Kai abandoned her, I'm afraid, so there was really nothing in her way."

"You're a lying snake! Show her to me!" growled Cole.

"I believe her wish is not to see you again as she is hoping to avoid a confrontation and is quite eager to begin her new life with me," said Pythor with a sly smile. "Perhaps you can glimpse her later as you pay

her homage after our wedding. Maybe even at the presentation of our firstborn…"

At this, Cole flung the four snake guards to the sides with a roar and launched himself at Pythor, knocking him down and doing his best, even with his restraints and injuries, to punch and kick the offensive snake while he had him on the floor.

With difficulty, Pythor's guards got the angry ninja under control again as their king rose, fuming. "You will pay for that, human! Bring in the trough!"

A large tub filled with partially melted snow was rolled into the room, and Cole was pushed to his knees by the side of it. With a nod from their commander, the snake guards forced the struggling ninja leader headfirst into the freezing liquid, fighting to hold him there while water sloshed around them and onto the floor. They let him up for a quick gulp of air, then submerged him again, holding him a little longer each time they did so.

At the apartment, Arwyn tensely held her breath each time the Serpentine pushed Cole down, exhaling only when he was let up for air. After what seemed like hours, when she feared his lungs would surely begin to fill with water, Pythor finally gave the signal to stop.

Coughing and gasping, Cole was dragged to his feet and flung against the nearest wall where his handcuffs were attached to a hook above his head while he shivered and dripped.

"I hope that has cooled you off, Ninja of Earth," sneered Pythor. "Now let's see how well-grounded you are."

He gave a nod, and a Serpentine guard stepped up to their prisoner. Cole screamed as an electric baton was jabbed into his right side without warning.

The pain from his cracked ribs coupled with muscle convulsions and the electric shock over his wet skin made his knees buckle, and he nearly lost consciousness. However, he glimpsed Pythor's leering face and forced himself upright again. _Show…no…weakness._

He endured several more shocks from the baton, yelling through gritted teeth, while the purple Anacondrai smirked maliciously at the scene.

Faking a yawn, the snake king finally waved his minion away. While Cole gasped for breath, Pythor slithered back and forth, glancing at him several times, as if considering his next move.

"Hmm…One last thing before we're done, ninja," started Pythor. He advanced on Cole until he was inches from his face before backing away again and looking him up and down.

"I would like to be able to easily identify you later after you've been made a Serpentine soldier."

He motioned to another snake coming in from the hallway carrying a smoking brand.

With a cruel smile, he asked, "How would you like to be an honorary Anacondrai?"

Cole's startled eyes widened at the sight of the iron brand. _What the hell!_ He suddenly pulled himself up by the handcuff chains and kicked high with both feet in an attempt to knock the brand out of the hands of the Serpentine carrying it, but the snake dodged him.

Before he could try another kick, the three other snakes were on him, pinning him to the wall. The branding snake quickly pressed the red-hot metal to the ninja leader's upper right chest.

Although the contact was brief, a hoarse cry of pain tore from Cole as the hot iron charred his skin, leaving the palm-sized symbol of the Anacondrai on his chest.

Pythor slithered up beside him and examined the backwards-S-shaped burn.

"Very good show! You will make an excellent Serpentine soldier!"

Cole stood tall and glared at him. "I will _die_ before that happens!" he snarled between bared teeth.

"Really? Well, I would like to see how much more you could endure, but it's getting to be my supper time, and this is getting tediousss. By the way," he turned to his guards before leaving the room, "give rations to his teammatesss, but no food or water to their leader here. Also, chain him standing in his cell, just for good measure. I don't wish for him to be too comfortable tonight."

Pythor slid out of the room, and the Serpentine guards moved to bring a more subdued Cole back to his cell.

Before the camera was shut off, Cole turned toward it and said simply, "I love you, Arwyn."

When the screen went black, a stunned Kai sat on the floor with his arm around Arwyn, who was pale, wide-eyed and trembling, a hand over her mouth. She had sunk to the floor during the electric shocks and had made no sounds other than to whisper Cole's name several times during the ordeal.

"They used all of our elements except his as torture," Kai muttered thoughtfully. He turned toward Arwyn and brushed several tendrils of hair from the side of her face. "Arwyn?" he asked tentatively. "Are you gonna be okay?"

She nodded after a long moment. Then she raised her head, staring at the blank television with a determined expression.

"I'm no longer hoping to destroy the Serpentine," she said in a low voice. "I'm going to annihilate them. Tonight."

A/N I hate Pythor...anyway, 2 chapters left to my first-ever story!

4. Chapter 4

A/N: No own Ninjago! Hope you like!

Chapter 4

Jay and Zane looked up a little later when they heard the approach of a small group. Cole was being half-dragged back to his cell accompanied by four Serpentine guardsmen. His legs were a little weak after the painful experience, and the smell from the brand on his chest made him somewhat nauseated.

Nothing was said by the ninja or the guards as Cole was stood against the wall and his handcuffs were secured to it above his head. Cole's small cup of water which sat on the floor near his concrete bed was removed as the meager rations and water cups of the other two ninja were placed inside their cells within their reach.

Jay spoke up curiously from his cell next to Cole's, "What about Cole's supper?"

One of the snakes looked over at the standing chained figure.

"Him? He's not to be fed again for his insssubordination until Pythor saysss so."

"Well, then…," said Zane as he defiantly kicked over his cup and plate.

Jay picked up his plate and cup and angrily flung them at the snakes. They attempted to dodge the food and water, then huffed off saying, "Fine, then you'll starve with him."

Cole gave a small smile to his brothers for their show of solidarity.

"Thanks for the support, guys, but you shouldn't go hungry for me," he said wearily.

"You were gone a long time, Cole. What happened back there? Why are they treating you like this?" asked Jay with concern, indicating Cole's upright position.

"Eh, the usual," answered Cole while shifting to a more comfortable stance. "And I was reminded of the plan to make snakes of us all. Especially Arwyn," he finished with a disgusted snarl.

With a quizzical look at Cole, Zane moved closer to the cell bars he shared with Jay. "Did they brand you?"

"Yeah, a little souvenir to help identify me later. Guess he wants to be able to recognize his competition." Cole closed his eyes and put his head back. "I want that snake dead in a _horrible_ way!"

After nightfall, Kai, in his red uniform, tightened the belts on his armor and adjusted the sword of fire on his back while he questioned Arwyn.

"Tell me what you plan on doing with the weapons. I get that we're gonna bust in there and kill snakes, rescue the others, et cetera, et cetera, but what else?"

Her katanas had been delivered with the golden weapons, so she placed them in the scabbards on her back and tucked Jay's nunchuks and Zane's shurikens into the belt of her dark green uniform before answering him.

"I just need to know that you'll back me and not let the others interfere while I attempt something."

"Um, is a _failed_ attempt gonna get you killed?" he asked uncertainly. "'Cause if it is, I don't think I can agree to do that. Later I might not be able to convince Cole that I did the right thing."

"As I see it, the worst that might happen is I could get captured, and we could all be stuck there, but that's not much different than the current situation, is it?" she asked with a lopsided grin as she reached for Cole's scythe, feeling hopeful for the first time in over a month.

"And since when are you concerned about how a plan may work out or if there's a plan at all, Mr. Impetuous?"

He considered that for a moment. "Point taken. But why do you insist on doing this alone?"

Arwyn sighed, "The guys are all injured and weakened, and I'll be needing the Mega Weapon, so we have nothing else but a couple of katanas and a knife. If you all try to help, someone's gonna be lost. Better that I do it alone while you stay with them. Obviously, the snakes are less likely to try to kill me."

From her look of determination, Kai knew he could not sway her decision. Taking a deep breath, he said, "We could argue this all night. Let's just do it."

"I'm ready!" she said as she headed for the door.

They were both in high spirits as they traveled by rooftop as much as possible toward the Serpentine-occupied building near the center of the city. They encountered very little activity along the way, but the snow and ice that had collected made the going a little slower than usual.

When they reached the building next door, the ninja spotted two Serpentine guards on their destination rooftop.

"Ah, appetizers," whispered Kai. "One for each of us."

With a nod and a running start, they leaped from one rooftop to the other. Kai landed squarely on his feet and ran in the direction of the snake at the back of the building.

Arwyn, however, hit a large patch of ice, and after sliding several yards on her hip, stopped at the feet of an astonished Serpentine guard near the front of the building. She recovered first, simply reaching out and grasping his ankle as she sent a stream of electricity coursing through him, dropping him quickly.

Having swiftly dispatched his snake, Kai met Arwyn as she was rising from her reclining position.

"No time for breaks. Ready for level two?" he asked as he headed for the stairwell ahead of Arwyn.

The two ninja stealthily descended the steps of the ten-story building, carefully listening for any activity that may be on the landing ahead. All was unusually quiet until they reached the second-floor landing of the closed stairwell. From there they began to hear the sounds of voices and movements from the first floor.

On the first floor landing, Kai reached for the door handle.

"We should probably clear the first floor before we head to the basement. We may have to get out this way later. Let me go first and if this looks too hopeless, maybe you should head back up and outta here," he suggested.

"No way I'm leaving here without four other ninja," his partner replied firmly.

He gave her a look of approval, then slowly turned the handle and pushed open the door.

Arwyn and Kai fleetingly took in the view of a large, worn apartment lobby in which milled about two dozen Serpentine. With little hesitation, the red ninja stepped out into the lobby, unsheathing and brandishing the golden sword of fire in one quick and fluid motion.

All Serpentine eyes turned to the stairwell door, and all movement and conversation stopped on the first floor of the building.

When the Green Ninja stepped out from behind him grasping the gleaming scythe of quakes with both hands, a collective gasp was heard. "Get her!"

"Ninjaaa…," Kai started. "GO!" finished Arwyn, and together they spun themselves into the bewildered Serpentine crowd.

Although they were armed, the snakes were not ready for the spinjitzu attack. The golden weapons flashed left and right, taking down Serpentine soldiers with seemingly little effort.

When she got close to the outside exit, Arwyn paused in the fighting long enough to seal the glass and metal door with a thick coating of ice to prevent any more snakes from entering.

As she turned back to the melee, she heard a snake call out, "Capture the Green Ninja! For Pythor!"

"Not today, slimy reptile," she muttered as she ducked under one leaping snake and swung the scythe through another two.

Arwyn was immediately joined by Kai who spun up to the last three snakes who crowded around the Green Ninja hoping to overpower her. Before they could counter his angry attack, all three lay dead on the floor.

The two ninja swiftly turned back toward the middle of the lobby, ready for more attacks, but then realized that no one else stood.

Pausing to catch her breath for a moment, Arwyn turned to face Kai, saying, "On to the basement and whatever surprises it holds."

"And don't forget," he added, "No fire or quakes in the sewer. We don't want to bring the house down."

"Fine."

They headed back into the stairwell and proceeded to descend quietly to the basement. Not a sound was heard as they crept slowly down the steps. When Kai got to the door, he paused briefly before turning the handle, shoving the door open, and leaping into the basement. No one was there.

"It's just a storage area," said Arwyn with relief. She closed the door and coated it with ice to seal out any other Serpentine.

"They must just use this building for surplus and lounging," observed Kai as he kicked over one of the boxes. "Let's get to exposing part of this south wall and create a little peephole."

Once they had cleared about ten feet of wall, she walked up to it grasping Cole's scythe in both hands.

"Should I knock first?" she asked, looking at Kai.

He shrugged and instructed, "Just do it high enough not to hit the bench on this wall."

"Here goes," Arwyn announced as she swung the scythe to her right, then to the left, burying it in the wall and opening a gash six feet long and two feet wide.

As the concrete pebbles scattered and the dust settled, a familiar and bewildered face slowly appeared over the bottom edge.

"Um, would you mind letting somebody know you're gonna do that ahead of time?" asked Jay as he brushed concrete bits out of his disheveled brown hair.

"Jay! I'm so glad to see you!" She leaned in and quickly kissed him on his dusty forehead." Now move outta the way so I can make a bigger hole to get through."

"I'm kinda chained to the bench here," he informed her.

"Okay, fine," she mumbled, as she side-kicked the concrete wall about where she thought the foot of the bed might be, enlarging the hole.

She could hear Jay telling his captive teammates, "You were right, Zane! It's Arwyn and Kai! They came for us!"

Another side kick and the opening was large enough for her to step through while stooping a little. She quickly stood up in Jay's cell as Kai followed through the broken wall and proceeded to cut Jay's chains with his sword.

With their help, Jay stood shakily with the bloody towel still wrapped around his otherwise bare upper body. She happily hugged him, ignoring the red marks left on her sleeves when she released him.

Looking to the left, she saw Zane, disheveled and paler than normal, smiling at her as he pulled on his chains to step closer to the bars of Jay's cell.

"Zane! You're okay!" Arwyn said with relief as she lifted the scythe.

"I _thought_ I sensed you and Kai! We are all better now that you two are here," he replied.

"Stand back!" she ordered before swinging the golden weapon to cut out the bars for Kai to enter. As Kai headed to Zane, Arwyn turned to look for Cole next.

What she saw took her breath away like she had been punched in the abdomen.

He was facing the others' cells, handcuffed, shackled and practically hanging from a hook above his head. His shaggier-than-usual black hair hung over his thick eyebrows, but did not hide a swollen, blackened eye. His exposed torso and arms were covered with huge bruises, bloody lacerations, and red welts, and the large, raw snake brand on his right upper chest glared at her.

Even with all of that, the ninja leader gave her a tired smile and said in a low, throaty voice, "Hi, sweetie."

With a determined look, Arwyn did not hesitate before using the scythe to cut away the bars for an entryway to Cole.

Alarms began to sound through the prison area and shouts could be heard down the sewer hallways as she stepped through the hole into his cell. She strode quickly up to him without a word, and the scythe easily sliced through his shackles and handcuff chains.

He half-fell into her arms as the chains broke away, and for a moment they clung to each other as if to life itself.

Kai wordlessly appeared beside them, placing a hand on Cole's shoulder.

Arwyn pulled away from Cole with tears in her eyes, lowered her mask and kissed him quickly, then asked, "Can you walk out of here?"

"I could run out of here carrying you if I had to," he answered with newly-found strength, referring to the first time he had rescued her.

"That won't be necessary," she retorted.

Kai and Arwyn offered Cole support on each side as they hastily made their way to the broken concrete exit.

"Zane and Jay are already in the basement, ready to move," stated Kai pointedly as they entered Jay's empty cell.

Arwyn said nothing until they had entered the basement with Cole as well. Slipping from under Cole's arm around her shoulders, she turned to him and tenderly placed her gloved right hand on his left cheek.

"I love you now and forever, my heart, but there is something I must do, and you have to let me go," she whispered to him, then briefly kissed him again as he looked at her in confusion.

"Arwyn, what…?" began Cole, but she moved away, evading his grasp as he reached for her.

"Kai, your sword," she ordered and took the hilt as he reluctantly passed it to her while she stepped over the concrete rubble back into Jay's cell.

She stopped and looked back at Kai, unsheathed a katana, and passed it to him quickly as she said, "If it looks like I'm not coming back, get them out."

His three male teammates looked at him dumbfounded when a pale-faced Kai turned back to them and the broken wall behind him instantly filled with ice. Jay and Zane began to frantically question him, but Cole's loud and angry shout quieted them.

"Arwyn! Where is she going? What are you _doing_, Kai?" The team leader attempted to push Kai aside, but the fire ninja was steadfast.

With his hands on the earth ninja's shoulders, Kai gave him a determined look and lowered his voice.

"She has something she needs to do, and she told me to stay here and not to let anyone interfere. Especially _you_, Cole."

The alarms continued to blare, and the chaotic noise in the sewer was louder now.

Cole glared angrily at Kai as he shoved his hands away.

"Are you _crazy_? We can't let her go in there alone! She'll get herself killed!"

"I don't think so," Kai said unwaveringly. "They want her alive too badly, remember?"

Jay and Zane moved to flank their leader and fixed Kai with uncertain gazes.

"Why are you letting her take such a risk, Kai? What are you thinking?" asked Zane.

Kai crossed his arms and spoke evenly, "I thought she was crazy when she told Garmadon she would heal him with the Mega Weapon, but she did it. We have to trust that she knows what she's doing this time, too."

"Just what _is_ she doing?" demanded Cole heatedly.

"I…uh," stuttered Kai evasively. "I'm not sure. She has the Mega Weapon. She just asked me to trust her."

Cole moved to within inches of Kai's face and said in a low growl, "I swear to you, brother, if anything happens to her…"

Kai met his glare steadily and did not let him finish. "You would be justified, Cole. I wouldn't fight you," he said quietly.

A/N: Thanks for the reviews! This is my first EVER story, so bear with me!

5. Chapter 5

**A/N: Don't own Ninjago. Last and longest chapter to this story. I hope you read and enjoy! Don't like, don't read. Again, I wrote this about 2 months ago, so no Misako, Overlord, etc. Thanks for the reviews! Never lose your imaginations!
**

Chapter 5

Trying to ignore Cole's concerned and irate cries, Arwyn had entered Jay's cell and covered the opening in the wall with ice to prevent snakes from getting to her unarmed and weakened brothers.

She then placed the sword and scythe together on the floor before adding the golden shurikens and nunchuks from her belt. As soon as the four golden weapons came together, a brilliant light flashed from the group and a sound like a gale began.

Another brighter flash of light and a crackle like lightning and the weapons had combined and transformed into the Mega Weapon, which she now preferred to call the Staff of Creation. She quickly scooped it up with both hands and stood.

Serpentine guards had arrived at the ninja's cells and stood clamoring on the other side of the bars, crying out in victory at the sight of the figure which stood before them. One of the guards began fumbling with a ring of keys, attempting to find the one which would allow them to get to Pythor's prize.

Narrowing her gaze and pointing two fingers at the crowd of snakes, Arwyn sent a bolt of lightning scorching through them. Burned and convulsing snakes fell to the ground as she walked up to the cell door, froze the lock, and used a front-kick to shatter it and fling it open. Stepping over a dead snake and into the sewer prison hallway, Arwyn looked right and left to assess her surroundings.

Seeing Serpentine approaching the area from both sides, she hastily built up an eight-foot wall of ice a few yards away on the right with a motion of her hand, blocking their way.

Turning to the left, she threw a ball of green concussive energy to slow the wave of snakes in that direction before forming a wall of ice to match the first.

Knowing she had little time in which to execute her plan, with a pounding heart, Arwyn turned her attention to the Staff of Creation. Gripping it tightly with both hands, she tried to focus on the request she would make, all the while hearing the snakes striving to scale or break through the ice.

Looking up with desperate hope at the intricate golden carvings she began, "Staff of Creation, I ask that you create something _now_ to destroy every Serpentine quickly without harming any human or any other living creature!"

As she finished and the staff began to tremble, Arwyn watched with concern as some snakes came over the top of one ice wall, while the other ice wall developed a crack from repeated ramming.

The Staff began to vibrate violently in her hands, and her entire body throbbed as she felt the power of her true potential flowing into it. A blinding white light shone from the Staff and around Arwyn as she seemed to turn a translucent gold. A loud thrumming from the Staff made her ears ring, and although she felt like she could not take a breath, it seemed that a wind was rushing through her.

The Serpentine who had cleared the wall halted their rush to capture her as they witnessed the scene before them. Then they noticed the thick purple mist that emanated from the head of the Staff.

Pythor suddenly appeared and pushed his way to the front of the crowd, leering at her brilliant figure and imagining what he would do with her power when he controlled her.

A sudden shattering of ice was heard as the battering ram broke through the ice wall and more snakes entered the hallway.

After a few moments, the light and sound emitting from the Staff ceased, yet the purple mist continued to pour from it and radiate out into the sewer.

The effects of her true potential faded, and Arwyn was left leaning on the Staff, panting for breath. As her eyes refocused, she looked up and realized she was surrounded by dozena of gawking, well-armed snakes, with Pythor standing just a few feet from her.

Fear flickered in her eyes, and she reached for her katana, unsheathing it quickly and holding it in a defensive stance. She knew that this was probably a futile effort since the Staff had seemed to drain so much of her energy, but she was not going to be taken easily.

When the hell is this mist going to start doing something? she thought nervously. _Maybe I_ should _have let the guys come with me. This seemed like a better idea yesterday._

Pythor laughed at her defensive actions and slithered toward her through the deepening mist.

"Ah, my Arwyn. I'm so happy you have decided to join usss," he hissed.

"Sorry, but I can't stay," she said with a forced smile. "I just came for a rescue and to drop off a package."

She glanced around warily as Pythor laughed again, and then she noticed something peculiar.

A snake to her right was brushing at a long strip of his own skin that was peeling down his chest. Another near him was doing the same to his arm. However, they were not the only ones.

All of the snakes began exclaiming in confusion and fear as they became aware of the sudden bloody shedding of their skins. They were not just shedding the outer layer. The entire dermis was actually peeling off of their bodies.

Exclamations turned to screams of pain. Pythor looked around in alarm and then looked down at himself. Large patches of his own scaly, purple exterior began to slough off of his body, revealing the fatty tissue and muscle beneath.

Arwyn stepped back in surprise and disgust just before she heard a sickening, popping sound. Turning, she saw a snake fall to the floor, then the head of the one next to him split open with the same sound.

More popping and cracking noises were heard, and the snakes began running and screaming in fear, tripping over their falling comrades.

Arwyn tore her shocked gaze from the traumatic scene when a scaly hand gripped her arm tightly.

She looked into Pythor's terrified eyes as he screamed, _"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!"_ then reflexively jerked her face to the side as his head burst open violently, and his blood splattered across her evergreen hood and uniform.

Shaking her head as if waking from a dream and swallowing hard to calm the nausea, she looked down at his body at her feet, then up at the Staff of Creation. The emission of mist from the Staff had stopped, but the vapor itself still thickened, swirled, and flowed throughout the sewer.

Sheathing her katana, she turned to head back to her teammates, avoiding the remaining panicked snakes who continued to run in both directions, stumbling over the dead and dying.

A green ball of energy to the intact ice wall brought down the barrier to that side of the hallway to allow free passage of the mist before Arwyn dashed into Jay's cell and shattered the ice there with another small blast.

On the other side of the wall, the worried faces of the waiting ninja flinched from the scattering shards.

Zane and Kai immediately stepped through the opening and grabbed her by the upper sleeves of her uniform, yanking Arwyn into the basement as she took one last look at the pandemonium in the sewer hallway.

She had no time to say a word before she was pulled against Cole's chest and wrapped tightly in his arms. The Staff was taken from her hand, and she hugged him back, but loosened her hold when he flinched slightly.

Behind her, she could hear a barrage of questions from the other three ninja about what was happening. Cole separated from her gently and held her a little away from him with a hand on either shoulder.

Narrowing his eyes, he looked at her hood and uniform in the dim light and asked, "What is this all over you?"

Arwyn looked down at the splatters on her clothes, then back up at Cole. "Pythor's blood," she said with satisfaction.

He looked at her incredulously and sputtered, "Y-you went back to kill _Pythor_?!"

"I went back to kill them all," she answered with conviction.

Stunned silence came from behind her, and she wondered about her brother's reactions, but she focused on Cole's wide eyes as fear shot through them and his face drained of all color.

A split second later, he turned a furious shade of red and gripped her shoulders until she winced while yelling, "YOU DID WHAT?! YOU WENT BACK TO TAKE ON THE _ENTIRE_ SERPENTINE ARMY _ALONE_?! WHAT WERE YOU _THINKING_?!"

He was interrupted in his tirade by Zane who put a firm hand on his arm, stopping him, and saying, "Now is not the time. We must be leaving this place."

Jay glanced down and saw the thick, purple fog flowing past his legs.

"What _is_ this stuff?" he asked, slightly alarmed.

"Snake killer. Harmless to humans," said Arwyn, looking down. "I'll explain later," she added, then stepped away from Cole who had released her shoulders.

"You bet you will," he growled.

Taking the Staff from Kai, she placed it on the floor in the mist while he proceeded to melt the ice over the basement exit.

"Separate to the four weapons!" she commanded and with a flash of light and a hiss the four weapons of spinjitzu appeared in place of the Staff.

Kai, Zane, and Jay grabbed their corresponding weapons and headed to the stairwell.

Arwyn picked up Cole's scythe, then took his hand. He still looked angry as he swiftly pulled her to him and the others entered the stairwell ahead of them.

Holding her close and lowering his face to her hooded ear, Cole said huskily, "I died about a thousand deaths waiting for you to come back just now. Don't _ever_ do something like that again."

Tugging down her mask, he kissed her hard for a moment, then pushed her gently ahead of him when Jay called from the stairs, "Do you two need an invitation to join us?"

The five ninja, with Kai in the lead, ascended to the first floor landing following the mist and cautiously opened the door to the lobby. Not hearing anything, Kai took a breath and flung the door open wider, stepping out quickly, ready to battle any snakes waiting in ambush.

Only the scattered bodies of the Serpentine he and Arwyn had dispatched earlier awaited them.

Looking around, Zane asked Kai, "Did you and Arwyn do this?"

Kai just nodded as he headed to the front door to melt the ice that blocked the entry.

"That must have been fun," remarked Jay.

When they reached the dark street, the cold struck them all with its icy breath, especially the shirt-less Jay and Cole. Despite that, the ninja paused a moment and inhaled the crisp air in appreciation.

Since the Serpentine invasion, after-dark curfew had been imposed on all humans throughout the city, so all was quiet. Then they heard the screams.

Turning toward the sound, they could see the dark mist rising from the manhole covers in the dim light of the street lamps. Several large, scaly heaps were apparent in the snow along the sidewalk and in the street.

Suddenly two shouting Serpentine ran into the street from a nearby alley and headed in the ninja's direction. The four who were armed readied for battle, raising their weapons in defensive stances as the Serpentine rapidly approached with their arms flailing, strips of skin flapping on their bodies.

Zane did not wait for the snakes to reach them, however. A shuriken was buried in the chest of each, freezing them before they could get too close, but not before the head of one split open.

"What the heck was _that_?!" exclaimed Jay in shocked disgust.

"_That_ is what the mist does to them," explained Arwyn.

Reaching for her comlink, she called the _Bounty_ and got Nya after a short wait. An ecstatic cry of joy was heard after Arwyn told Nya they were all out and on their way home.

"Can you meet us on the west side near the marketplace?" asked Arwyn.

"I'll be there in fifteen minutes!" replied Nya. "And tell Jay I love him!"

Jay excitedly grabbed the comlink from Arwyn and turned away from the group, speaking softly. He could still be heard by them when he told Nya that he loved her, too, and could hardly wait to see her.

"I've had enough of this place. Let's get out of here," said Kai.

Cole took over. "Zane, can you manage your snow mobile?"

The ice ninja nodded as the shurikens transformed into his vehicle. "Not a problem."

Cole took the comlink from the still-talking Jay. "Jay, ride with Zane to the _Bounty_," he ordered.

"Aw, I can fly!" he argued. "I'm going back to Nya. I could do anything right about now!"

Cole was firm. "Ride with Zane. We don't need you losing focus in the Storm Fighter after all you've been through."

"Fine!" retorted the lightning ninja as he sat behind Zane on the snow mobile.

Kai was already on his Blade Cycle. "I'm heading to the apartment for the weapons' case if there isn't any trouble. I'll meet you all at the _Bounty_," he said as he revved his engine.

"Take the comlink just in case," advised Cole as he tossed it to him.

Arwyn turned to Cole and put an arm around his waist. "By the way, I'm driving," she informed him right before the scythe converted to the Tread Assault around them in a flash of light.

He winced as he settled back against the rear seat, saying, "Just try to avoid the potholes."

The short ride to the west-side marketplace was largely uneventful for the ninja team. Other than seeing several snakes' bodies in the street along the way, the only thing out of the ordinary was the wispy purple vapor that coiled over the snow around the city.

Arwyn tried to stay focused on the vehicle, glancing back now and then to see how Cole fared. He had leaned his head back and looked a little pale and sick in the dim light, so she stayed quiet.

By the time they arrived at the meeting place, the _Bounty_ was pulling up also. Zane and Arwyn converted the vehicles back to weapons and assisted Jay and Cole toward the _Bounty_.

Nya was descending in the cargo lifter used for packages and those who could not climb the anchor chain. She leapt over the side of the cargo lifter without bothering to open the small gate and rushed toward Jay who had a large grin and held out his arms ready to clasp her to him.

He grimaced only slightly as her arms wrapped around his lacerated back and kissed her until Zane, Arwyn, and Cole were pretty sure the couple had forgotten where they were.

Kai rode up and landed on his feet as his Blade Cycle disappeared. With his sword in hand, he strode toward the kissing couple with a frown, dropping the weapons case, and saying, "Come up for air and hug your brother for a change!"

Jay reluctantly released Nya who ran to Kai and joyfully threw her arms around his neck. When she felt the stickiness, she drew away from him and looked down in shock at the blood on her arms.

"Kai! What happened to you?" she cried out in alarm.

Kai looked down and calmly said, "That's not mine, it's Jay's."

She whirled around to see Arwyn guiding Jay and Cole into the cargo lifter.

"Don't freak just yet," Arwyn said in response to Nya's wide-eyed gasp as she finally noticed the red-stained towel draped around Jay's shoulders. "I'm going to need you to help me with these two. They need showers first. While they're doing that, we need to get a lot of suture, dressings, and antibiotics ready to go. I have a feeling we'll be busy for a while tonight."

Nya rode back up with the two worst-injured ninja while Kai and Arwyn waited in the snow with Zane, whom Arwyn did not want attempting to climb the chain.

When Nya, Jay, and Cole arrived on deck, Sensei Wu and Garmadon were there with worried expressions.

"My wounded warriors…," said Wu sadly as he got his first look at the earth and lightning ninja. "What has happened to you?"

"Serpentine," answered Cole simply.

"They like to play with knives," stated Jay bitterly.

"And branding irons, it would seem," added Garmadon, looking pointedly at the team leader's chest.

Eleven-year-old Lloyd appeared by his father's side and hung his head.

"This is all my fault! If I had never released them, the Serpentine would never have done this to you! This is all my fault!" he said with his face in his hands and his voice cracking. "I'm so, so sorry!"

Cole walked up to Lloyd and placed an arm around the boy's shoulders while lifting his face with his other hand.

"Lloyd, this is _not_ your fault," Cole said firmly once he had eye contact. "You may have released them, but they didn't have to do any of the things they have done. You need to let it go now."

Lloyd nodded a little uncertainly.

"Now, Arwyn, Zane, and Kai are waiting for you to bring them up," directed Cole.

At the mention of their names, Lloyd's face brightened and he ran to the cargo-lifter controls.

"I got dibs on our shower, and you get to use the flowery, tutti-frutti-body-whatever in the girls' shower!" announced Jay as he and Cole headed down below deck.

While they waited with Kai in the snow, Arwyn put her arms around Zane's waist and held her friend while he returned the embrace. The tired trio was quiet for a moment, which gave Arwyn a chance to reflect on all that her brothers had suffered.

Most of Cole, Kai, and Jay's injuries were fairly obvious, but Zane was going to be harder to assess. He had been beaten like the rest, but being a nindroid, his skin did not bruise like theirs, so although he felt the pain, he did not show the same marks. That, however, did not mean he was not injured in some way. Besides that, his circuitry needed to be evaluated after the overheating episode. Jay would have to help once he was treated for his injuries.

Zane finally sighed and spoke, "I am so proud of you for resisting surrendering, Arwyn."

She cringed a little at that remark and glanced at Kai who raised an eyebrow.

"But why did you take such a huge chance by going back into the sewer without us?"

She drew away from him. "None of you, except Kai, were in any shape to help me much, and you all would have been unarmed. I had to use the Staff of Creation, but I'll explain all of that later," she answered.

"That was the longest six point seven minutes of our lives while we waited for you. For a while, I thought Cole was going to murder Kai if he did not first have a stroke," Zane said with a chuckle.

Arwyn hid a guilty smile.

"You can laugh now," Kai remarked dryly, "but he nearly put me through the wall when you left. Then he just stood there and scowled at me in silence while I guarded the opening trying not to look nervous. I was scared to death for you, but I was also thinking, 'Cole is the strongest person in Ninjago. Will a couple of broken ribs keep him from killing me?' Even Jay kept his mouth shut the whole time. He didn't want to be the target! You don't know how relieved we all were when you finally busted through that ice."

Arwyn noticed the approach of the cargo lifter. Reaching for it she said apologetically, "I'm sorry, guys, but I didn't think there was a better way to do it given the circumstances."

She opened the small gate on the lifter when it reached the ground and motioned Zane inside, "Your carriage, m'lord." The three friends entered the lifter and ascended to the deck of the _Bounty_.

Sensei Wu and Garmadon stood there waiting for them. Before Arwyn could bow to the two older men, Lloyd rushed forward from the cargo-lifter controls and threw his arms around her, nearly knocking her off of her feet.

He tried to keep the tears from escaping his eyes as he said against her chest armor, "I didn't think you were ever coming back!" Then he quickly added, "Any of you!" as he looked up at Kai and Zane.

Kai snickered, "Yeah, right, squirt. We already know she's your favorite!"

Arwyn grinned and hugged Lloyd again as he blushed, then looked up at Wu and Garmadon. "When did you get back home?"

"Yesterday," answered Wu. "It seems that we chose a poor time to take an excursion."

Arwyn shrugged, "Having everyone home may have shortened the ordeal, but it may not have changed it."

"So what happened?" inquired Garmadon with concern.

"Long story with several chapters," responded Kai leading Zane across the deck.

"Right," said Arwyn, heading for the stairs to below deck. "For now we need to get started treating injuries."

After Cole and Jay had bathed, they had been brought to the infirmary by Kai and Nya for their next trial.

"Drink Sensei's tea for pain, Jay. It'll help with the suturing," coaxed Arwyn.

Jay turned his head away from her and the red-eyed Nya who had just gotten a good look at the knife cuts covering his back. "I don't want to. It smells nasty!"

"Jay, you have to! I don't have enough anesthetic right now to do your entire back _and_ Cole's lacerations. Would you rather do this without _anything_?" asked Arwyn as she tried to convince him to drink it since she did not want to hold him down for this.

"Please, Jay, for me?" tried Nya sweetly, hoping he would not have to endure more than he already had.

"Nope," he stated adamantly. "It really smells putrid! I know it'll taste disgusting, too."

"Okay, fine," said Arwyn, picking up the forceps and needle holder with the curved suture needle and brandishing them in his face with a smile. "Lie on your stomach, and let's get this started," she instructed.

Noticing the needle, his left eyebrow twitched slightly. "Gimme the stupid tea," he demanded, and Nya handed him the cup with a relieved sigh.

"Geez, Jay, you handled the knife with a lot less whining than this," teased Kai who stood with his arms crossed next to a smirking Zane.

Cole laughed from his bed on the other side of the room while holding his right side.

Arwyn spoke up as she covered Jay's back with antiseptic, "Watch it over there. You're next, you know."

"Hey, I've had a lot worse," retorted Cole. "I can handle drinking a little cup of stinky tea."

There was a momentary silence in the room as everyone soberly considered the truth to his words.

"Lighten up, guys. It's over, and we'll all be okay," Cole said quietly. "The Serpentine did their best to break us, but they failed. They will _never _do it."

"You are probably right, Cole," said a satisfied-looking Sensei Wu from the doorway. Garmadon stood behind him with a small smile on his wise face.

"Those of you who can should go to the game room and see the special announcement that is being delivered by the media of Ninjago City," Wu instructed. "It seems that dead and dying Serpentine are being found all over the streets of the city along with a strange fog, and that the sewer is full of dead snakes."

"Would you know anything about why that is happening, Arwyn?" asked Garmadon, sounding amused as the room quickly cleared of occupants.

Arwyn paused in her stitching and glanced at Cole who had sat up with difficulty on his small bed. "It worked," she breathed in amazement.

Cole addressed Garmadon and Sensei Wu with a frown, "She's got a _lot _of explaining to do when we're done here."

"Yeah," said Jay sleepily from his prone position, "when we're _done_."

Once all of the suturing on Cole and Jay was complete, dressings were applied, and she was satisfied that Cole's ribs were only cracked and then well-wrapped, Arwyn and the others gathered in the dining room with a little food and drink.

Zane had decided that Jay could wait to assess him _after_ he sobered up.

Because of the late hour, Cole, Jay, Kai, and Zane gave only brief accounts of their experiences since meeting the Serpentine hoard five weeks before in the city.

Arwyn then gave a quick description of her quest for the four ninja before she and Kai recounted the last three days' events in more detail minus the fight in the snow. When she got to the part about the Staff of Creation in the sewer, Arwyn minimized the action. Cole narrowed his gaze at her as if to say_ I know you're leaving something out_. Finally, everyone agreed it was time for much-needed rest and headed for their dearly-missed beds.

After bidding everyone goodnight and kissing Cole outside the men's bunk room door, Arwyn headed to the shower. When she was done, she crossed the hall to her bedroom and was surprised to find Cole stretched out on her bed when she flicked on the lamp.

"Ooo, a mint on my pillow!" she said lightly with a smile as she slid under the sheet next to him. "Why aren't you in your bed?"

"I couldn't bear to spend the night down the hall when I haven't even seen you in over a month," he said quietly against her hair as he pulled her to his chest.

She smiled and fingered the dressing over the brand near his right shoulder, saying, "You know doctor's orders are for rest and no strenuous activity, right?"

The earth ninja gave a deep chuckle, "I don't think there's a chance of doing much of anything considering the shape I'm in right now. It's hard for me to even find a spot that doesn't hurt."

Arwyn lifted her face to his and kissed the side of his mouth where the lip was not cut. He gazed at her tenderly, then his look turned quizzical. "When did you get the black eye? I just noticed it's not swollen."

Her smile disappeared, and she turned her face away, mumbling, "Would you believe I ran into a door?"

"No-o-o…," he said slowly. "I want the truth. I know it was getting late, but I think you left a lot out of your story tonight."

She hedged, saying, "I'd rather not talk…"

Cole interrupted her with a frown. "Is Kai involved in this?"

"Well, he…," she started.

"Then I need to hear it now, or I won't be able to rest tonight," he replied firmly.

She rolled onto her back away from him and sighed, "Okay,…here goes the account of my most shameful moment ever…"

After recounting the story of her emotional turmoil the last few weeks and her attempt at surrendering the night before, Arwyn lay with her eyes

closed and waited with a knot in her stomach for Cole's disappointed reaction.

He had not said a word during her tale, and she had stared at the ceiling as she told it. He took a breath and said, "I'm not very thrilled about the fact that Kai slept with you in a single bed, or that you almost handed yourself over to the Serpentine, but I know why you tried to do that." Arwyn relaxed a little next to him. "Your compassion was almost your downfall. You were willing to sacrifice yourself to take a chance at making things better for us. I can't really fault you for that."

He turned and painfully lifted himself onto his left elbow to face her. Leaning over to look her in the face and placing his right index finger on the tip of her nose, he continued, "I _can_ be upset that you ignored an order from me, Zane, and Jay, though. I'm also disappointed that you thought we would judge you harshly, so you decided not to tell us at all. As punishment, you have to tell Zane and Jay about this tomorrow."

She winced, remembering Zane's earlier remark.

"And," he added, "Now I've got to chew out Kai for aiding and abetting."

"Kai was only doing what I asked him to do," Arwyn protested.

"Okay, and who's the leader of this team and most likely to pound him into the ground?" Cole asked with a raised eyebrow.

She gave a small laugh as she ran her fingers through his hair. "Just go easy on him. If it wasn't for him stopping my surrendering, we might all be snakes right now."

"I'll think about it," he said as he leaned forward and kissed her while reaching for the lamp switch.

A/N That's all for this story! Hope you liked! Please review if you did! Peace to all!

End file.